

WASHINGTON - Congressman Steny Hoyer (D-MD) today released a letter from 19 House Democrats, including Maryland Representatives Ben Cardin, Dutch Ruppersberger, and Al Wynn, to Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson, stating opposition to the Bush Administration's decision to "reprogram," or move funds from state and local bioterrorism preparedness.

The Administration has notified Congress that they plan to shift \$55 million in Fiscal 2004 bioterrorism preparedness funding that was already appropriated away from the State and Local Bioterrorism Preparedness to other initiatives. This proposal is vigorously opposed by the nation's governors, public health officials, and public health advocates.

Under this "reprogramming," Maryland will lose \$1.085 million in bioterrorism preparedness funds that the state expected to receive for fiscal year 2004 - this amounts to 7% of Maryland's funding for this year.

"The combination of this reprogramming or shifting of funds, and the Bush Administration's proposal to cut the bioterrorism program by \$105 million in their Fiscal Year 2005 budget request, will harm our nation's ability to prepare for a bioterrorist attack," said Congressman Hoyer. "I urge Secretary Thompson to reconsider this decision."

The text of the letter is below:

June 3, 2004

The Honorable Tommy G. Thompson

Secretary

Department of Health and Human Services

200 Independence Avenue S.W.

Washington DC 20201

Dear Secretary Thompson:

We are writing in strong opposition to your recent decision to reprogram FY 2004 funds for state and local bioterrorism preparedness. Reducing these previously appropriated funds will seriously impair important progress in our nation's ability to prepare for a biological or chemical incident.

After September 11, 2001 and the subsequent anthrax attacks, our nation recognized that our public health infrastructure needed to be upgraded in order to respond quickly and accurately to new biological and chemical threats. The state and local public health preparedness program at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) was created to better prepare our public health infrastructure to deal with this new type of threat.

Since the first funds were awarded in FY 2002, states and local health departments have made tremendous progress, however there is much more work to be done. States have not yet even been awarded funds for FY 2004, and they have until August 2004 to spend and report their FY 2003 funds. Your proposal to divert FY 2004 funds will significantly weaken these efforts and force states to lay off or cut back on hiring epidemiologists and public health specialists, delay implementing emergency response training and equipment purchases, and postpone or cancel other planned preparedness programs.

We do not oppose your new efforts to fund other preparedness efforts, but we are concerned that this is being done at the expense of, rather than in addition to, a strong commitment to state and local preparedness. We hope that you will reconsider this decision, and take steps to avoid actions that will impede important progress to improve our nation's preparedness.

Sincerely,

/s/ STENY H. HOYER

/s/ BARON P. HILL

/s/ ROSA L. DELAURO

/s/ PATRICK KENNEDY

/s/ RICHARD A. GEPHARDT

/s/ WM. LACY CLAY

/s/ EARL POMEROY

/s/ VIC SNYDER

/s/ JAMES R. LANGEVIN

/s/ ALAN B. MOLLOHAN

/s/ C.A. DUTCH RUPPERSBERGER

/s/ ALBERT R. WYNN

/s/ NICK J. RAHALL

/s/ KEN LUCAS

/s/ MIKE ROSS

/s/ LEONARD L. BOSWELL

/s/ PETER J. VISCLOSKY

/s/ BENJAMIN L. CARDIN

/s/ JOHN S. TANNER

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